

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present invention, generally speaking, provides a method and apparatus for setting up a telephone connection using an email address or the like. In many cases, an email address or other Internet address such as a URL may be easily remembered or, in the case of a company, for example, may often be correctly guessed, whether the company is local, out-of-state, or in another country. Telephone numbers, on the other hand, are remembered only with considerable difficulty, and can be guessed correctly only through clairvoyance. (In fact, memory experts that have astounded audiences by memorizing large portions of the local telephone directory have done so by converting the numbers to words or phrases using a set of rules.) In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a character string is entered into an electronic system such as a personal computer, a deskset smartphone, or a cellular smartphone. A determination is made as to whether or not the character string is a telephone number. If so, a desired telecommunications connection is established directly using the phone number. If not, a preliminary telecommunications connection is established using the character string. The preliminary telecommunications connection may be to a mail server or a Web server, for example. During the course of the preliminary telecommunications connection, a telephone number is received. Preferably, the first thing the user receives back is what the users wants—a phone number—without any intermediate interaction. The telephone number is then used to establish the desired telecommunications connection. Telephone numbers are preferably "self-listed," i.e., stored in accordance with a naming convention on the email or other server. The method may be entirely automated to achieve in effect an Internet-based, world-wide, distributed telephone directory. The entities listed in the directory may themselves determine listing content and access policies.

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